



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT**

June 8, 2012

Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Perez:

As the Chief of Police of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), the primary law enforcement agency in the District of Columbia, I am committed to safeguarding residents of and visitors to the nation's capital and to providing top quality police service to our community. In order to ensure that the dedicated men and women of the Department and I are doing this to the best of our ability, I am requesting your assistance with a significant issue that has just been brought to my attention.

On May 30th, I received communication from the Human Rights Watch (HRW) indicating that the organization had been reviewing MPD's handling of adult sexual assault cases for the past 16 months and will be publishing a report shortly. Although HRW was not willing to allow us to review the report or any of the data to substantiate it, they did ask for a response to their letter, which alleges that members of MPD's Sexual Assault Unit (SAU) had: 1) failed to follow-up on complaints from survivors of sexual abuse; or 2) treated victims of sexual abuse in an insensitive manner.

The Department is committed to thoroughly investigating all allegations of sexual abuse, while being sensitive to the unique impact of this crime on its victims. Since 2008, MPD has worked with professionals and advocates in implementing a series of reforms on the handling and investigation of sexual abuse cases, from the hospital to the police. These reforms culminated in final revisions, published in August 2011, to policies and procedures for MPD's Sex Assault Unit, which handles these difficult investigations.

Although we have to some extent responded to HRW's letter (attached), the Department's ability to assess the findings is limited because of an inconvenient catch-22: HRW is not willing to share any information about the cases evaluated – even the dates of the alleged incidents or detectives involved – because of their concern for the privacy of the victims and professional standing of interviewees. However, because of our equal concern for victims and the legal protections for others involved in any investigation, and since any information that we release under a Freedom of Information Act request will be open to the public, there is significant information in case files that we cannot release to HRW. As a result, we have no way of knowing whether most of the cases referenced in the letter or the yet-to-be-seen full report occurred before or after the reforms. We do know that the letter references depositions for a crime and investigation that occurred in 2006 – well before the reform effort and even before my tenure began in 2007.

I am asking for your assistance because I am greatly concerned by the conclusions reached by HRW, but have no way to evaluate the accuracy of their findings. As detailed in the attached response, we agree that many of the recommendations are sound ideas and will begin implementing them. Several of them have already been implemented, while others fall under the auspices of prosecutors, with whom we will share the report. Nevertheless, it is critically important for the Department to be able to assess whether these problems are still occurring or pre-dated the reforms. Our own source of data – citizen complaints received either by MPD or by the independent Office of Police Complaints – does not indicate that these problems persist. Over the past four years, only 12 complaints have been filed regarding the current detectives in the SAU, representing less than one percent of their investigations, and only one complaint has been sustained.

Based on what I have seen and the information that I have, I believe that the Sexual Assault Unit is providing dedicated service to victims in need and has embraced these reforms that have strengthened their efforts and collaboration with the community. However, I would like to ask for your assistance as an impartial third party to review the report and our cases. Although HRW will not share the details of its investigations with MPD, I would hope that they would share them with the Department of Justice. Your assistance would help to ensure that the Department provides the level of service that victims of sexual abuse deserve. Moreover, it will help us to determine the effectiveness of our change efforts as an organization.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this request. I look forward to hearing your response and hope that we may speak soon to plan the next steps. You may reach me at (202) 727-4218 or cathy.lanier@dc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cathy L. Lanier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cathy" being the most prominent part.

Cathy L. Lanier
Chief of Police

cc: Vincent C. Gray, Mayor
Paul A. Quander, Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
Phil Mendelson, Chair, Committee on the Judiciary, Council of the District of Columbia